

China Sentences House Church Leaders to Prison

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Bypassing the court system, China arbitrarily sentenced five more leaders of the Fushan Church in Linfen City, Shanxi Province, on Monday, this time to re-education labor camps for two years, according to China Aid Association (CAA).

A Chinese court last week sentenced five house church leaders to three to seven years in prison after they were arrested en route to Beijing to file a complaint about an attack on their church, according to the advocacy organization. The five leaders sentenced to labor camps this week were accused of “gathering people to disturb the public order” after they organized a prayer rally of 1,000 people the day after military police and others attacked their church members and building on Sept. 13.

Pastors Yang Rongli (left) and Wang

Xiaoguang, shown in this

image released by China Aid Association, were among 10 house church leaders sentenced to prison or hard labor in recent weeks.

China Sentences Five More Christian Leaders

In what CAA

termed “an arbitrary administrative sentence by the Public

Security Bureau

enacted so the leaders would not be 'required' to go through the court and

prosecution system," China delivered the verdicts to church leaders Li

Shuangping, Yang Hongzhen, Yang Caizhen (wife of Pastor Yang Xuan, who was

sentenced to three years of prison on Nov. 25), Gao Qin (also known as Gao

Fuqin), and Zhao Guoai.

"Yang Caizhen was seen

being beaten severely during an interrogation," CAA said in a press statement.

"Having had one of her front teeth knocked out during a beating, and fasting and

praying during her detention, Ms. Yang is reported to look very

fragile."

The church leaders, the

latter four women, were arrested on Nov. 11. They had helped to organize a

prayer rally after the Sept. 13 attack on the Fushan Church branch congregation

in Linfen, when some 400 uniformed police and civilians

bearing shovels, batons, bricks, iron hooks and other weapons had beaten members

of the church who were sleeping at the nearly finished factory building used as

a worship site.

With several Fushan County

officials involved in the attack, more than 30 Christians were seriously injured

among the 100 Christians who were hurt, CAA reported.

According to

the *Epoch*

Times, a church member's

relative obtained a license to build the shoe factory and was allowing the group

to meet there, as the church was growing too large to meet in homes and the

building could hold up to 400 people.

As Chinese authorities

had kept the families of Gao Qin and Zhao Guoai under tight surveillance, CAA

relied on church sources to confirm their sentences to labor camp. The

organization said family members had confirmed the sentences of the other

three.

"Linfen house church

Christians continue to be monitored by Chinese military police, including

neighboring Golden Lampstand Church (Jin Dongtai) in Linfen City," CAA

stated.

The organization said

authorities violated Chinese law by refusing to provide family members of the

prisoners with copies of documents notifying them of the sentences.

All 10 of the Fushan

Church leaders plan to appeal their sentences, according to CAA.

"To arbitrarily send

five innocent citizens to labor camps is in direct violation against the

international human rights covenants and norms the Chinese

government has signed and even ratified,” said CAA President Bob Fu.

The five pastors previously sentenced were arrested on Sept. 25 without a warrant, according to CAA. Yang Rongli was sent to prison for seven years for “illegally occupying farming land” and “disturbing transportation order by gathering masses.”

She and four other pastors were sentenced on Nov. 25 at the People’s Court of Raodu district, Linfen City, Shanxi Province. Yang’s husband, Wang Xiaoguang, was handed a sentence of three years on the charge of “illegally occupying farming land.” Cui Jiaxing was sentenced to four and half years, and Yang Xuan to three and half years, on the same charge; Zhang Huamei received four years of prison for “disturbing transportation order by gathering masses.”

The pastors were arrested by Shanxi Province officers of the Public Security Bureau (PSB). Fu characterized their trial as a farce, saying the case demonstrated a deteriorating state of religious freedom in China.

Yang Rongli and Wang Xiaoguang had led the Fushan Church, part of a 50,000-strong house church network in Linfen and the surrounding villages, for more than 30 years.

The Beijing PSB has misrepresented the demolition

and attack on the Linfen branch church as a response to a
“violent uprising,” Fu
said.